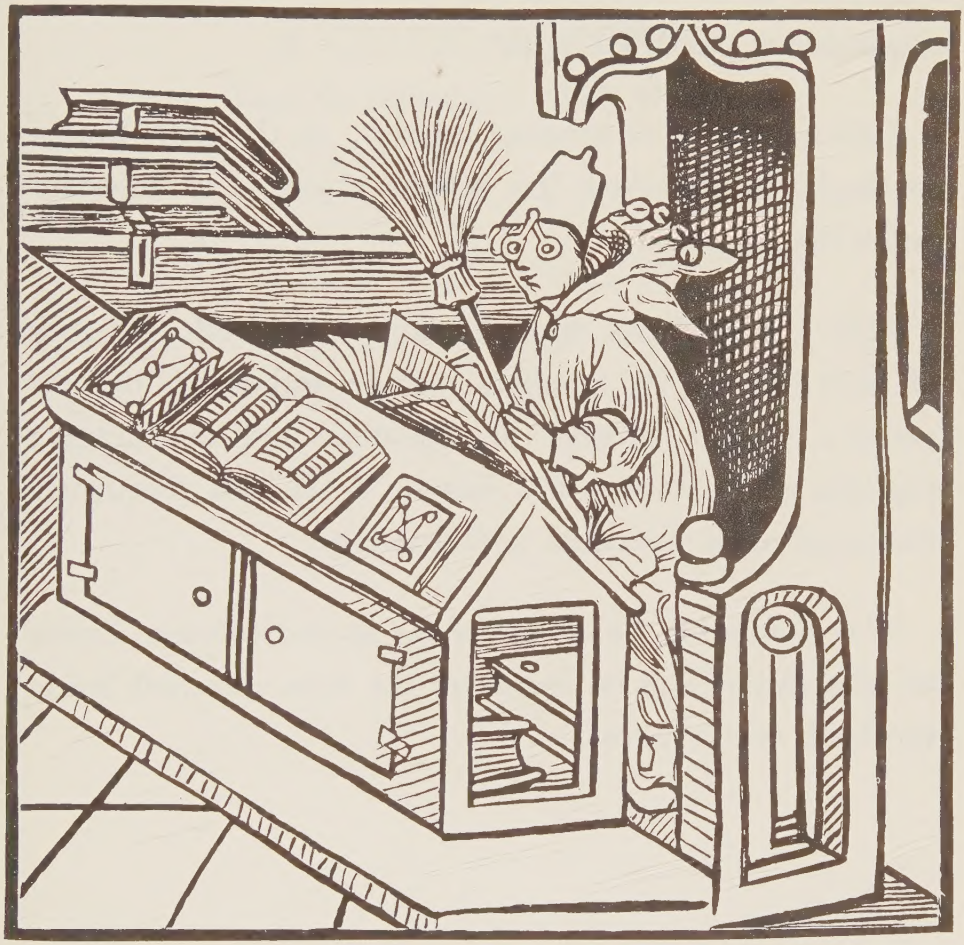
Modern Prose Literature



THE CHAPBOOK

A MONTHLY MISCELLANY No 8 [Vol II] February, 1920

THE POETRY BOOKSHOP 35 DEVONSHIRE STREET THEOBALDS ROAD, LONDON, W.C. 1

PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE NET

THE CHAPBOOK (a monthly miscellany) was founded in July, 1919, as a substitute for the quarterly, POETRY AND DRAMA, the publication of which was suspended at the end of 1914.

Each number is of separate interest. At the same time a continuity is preserved. Its general object is to entertain rather than to elevate.

THE CHAPBOOK appears between the 10th and 20th of each month. Its numbers include anthologies of new poetry; critical surveys of literature and the drama; reprints, plays, essays and songs. It is also frequently decorated with woodcuts and drawings.

This number is the second of the second volume. Terms of subscription will be found on the form attached inside the back of the cover.

See also p. 3 of Cover [*facing p.* 32].

MODERN PROSE LITERATURE

A CRITICAL SURVEY

(Under the Editorship of ALEC WAUGH)

THE CHAPBOOK
Number Eight · Volume Two · February 1920

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A Note on Criticism

IT is not uncommon to see the advertisements of an agency that offers in return for a small fee " authoritative criticism." Probably it would not be difficult to pronounce judgment on the majority of the MSS. that would be forwarded for inspection, but the wording of the advertisement does make one stop and think. " Authoritative Criticism," it is a noble phrase, and one is forced to ask oneself whether such a thing exists at all.

For criticism, if it is to have any value, must be the expression of the writer's personal taste. One may talk of standards, of values, of the eternal tenets of art, but it always comes back to this in the end, either " I like this " or " I do not like this, these are my reasons ? " There is no such thing as impersonal criticism. And so it is that favourable criticism is usually more important than mere iconoclasm. If a man of taste can honestly say that he admires a poem, play or a picture, then that piece of work should possess some merit or it would not have appealed to him. But if he does not like it, it does not at all mean that the poem or play is bad.

We are everywhere limited by our experience, and we cannot appraise justly things that lie outside it. In our imagination we may picture ourselves in certain situations, and say to ourselves " if that were to happen I should behave like this," and then when the situation arises we behave in an entirely different way. In literature as in life we are bounded by our experience ; and it is no use trying to criticise the expression of an emotion that we have not ourselves felt. The critic should realise that certain things live outside his scope. He should specialise on what he understands.

And yet every critic thinks that he can lay down the law on all subjects. And if a man feels anything intensely enough, nothing will stop him saying it. But it is at the same time as well to realise that there is no such thing as authoritative criticism ; and that when Mr. Jones says Mr. Smith is a bad novelist, it may mean little more than that Mr. Smith is a writer with sympathies into which it would be impossible for Mr. Jones to enter.

Criticism is the expression of the critic's individual taste. And Mr. George Moore is in many ways the greatest of modern critics simply because he has never attempted to get away from the first person. He has said what he liked, and explained why he liked it. He has never sat on the professional bench, solemnly pronouncing judgments. It is for the critic to interpret the work of great men, to reveal their qualities of which many had been in ignorance, and to stimulate an appreciation of them. Criticism must inevitably be a form of autobiography.

Modern Critical Prose

BY DOUGLAS GOLDRING

WARS, perhaps inevitably, have a bad effect on the critical spirit. They make the necessary detachment difficult or impossible, play havoc with our standards of values, and leave us often with an after-taste of commercialism which it takes years to eradicate. After a war such as the one from which we have just emerged, nothing is more necessary than the restoration of criticism to its old prestige, and it is one of the hopeful signs of the times that attempts in this direction are beginning to be made. Such portents as the booming of the " war poets " (one of the many frauds worked on the reading public during the past five years) and the rapid growth of the literary cliques, have helped to rouse a spirit of uneasiness and of enquiry. Questions are being asked as to how our leading critics and our reviewers have fulfilled their trust during the years of their immunity.

The present condition of the arts in England would scarcely seem to do them much credit. Of the much desired Renaissance there are indeed signs, but they are few. For the rest, some of the flowers of yesteryear linger on, faded but still fragrant, the conservatories make a bright enough show of rather garish exotics, but the business in the imitation flower market goes on unchecked. Spring, no doubt, " is coming." It is an unreliable season ; but it comes eventually. Only if we look carefully can we see the few early crocuses which herald its approach.

The state in which the war has left the arts seems to be much worse in the case of some of them than in that of others. The art of the music-hall, so characteristically English yet so strangely neglected, appears to be dying rather from lack of interest on the part of the critics than from any other cause. Criticism has indeed ignored it, with the result that the " super-beauty " chorus—pushed on by the women's clothing trusts and other promoters of big business—has practically ousted the comedian and the soubrette from their rightful place. Playwriting in England, except as a business

proposition, seems almost to have stopped, though Mr. Bernard Shaw tends the sacred lamp, while Mr. J. C. Squire, in a patriotic frenzy, tries feebly to blow it out. (Alas, the hatred of the " truth-teller " shown by some of our Panjandrums is open and unashamed. They do not seem to realise that this hatred is ultimately a hatred of Beauty itself). In painting and the plastic arts there are more hopeful signs. The work of the pre-war revivalists is beginning to receive recognition, and with their written criticism—of which Mr. Wyndham Lewis' " The Caliph's Design " is the best example—it is beginning to break down barriers of prejudice and to give the painting of the future its chance. Poetry, the essay and the novel are at least alive as art forms, though it cannot be said that their liveliness owes much to the discernment of the critics.

Perhaps as a indication of the " note " struck by the average criticism of to-day two recent episodes may profitably be contrasted. First, in 1915, thanks to a newspaper attack, a novel, by one of the very few authentic geniuses which England has thrown up in the past ten years, was burnt by the police, while the reviewers and the author's *confrères* either applauded or looked the other way. Secondly, the statue of Samuel Butler, twenty years after his death, has been reverently borne aloft, by the oldest as well as the youngest of our critics, and placed solemnly within its niche. (After all, I suppose the lion can never be a really popular animal, can never be really *safe*, until after he is dead and skinned !).

In any attempt at a detailed consideration of modern critical prose, a start must surely be made with the work of Mr. Edmund Gosse. Among the English critics who are still at work, Mr. Gosse occupies a unique position. He may be described perhaps as the Supreme Pontiff of English Letters, and undoubtedly he has many qualifications which fit him for his enviable place. He is learned and widely read. His prose is generally sonorous, and he has occasionally a biting turn of phrase which saves it from pomposity. In addition, he has a well-ordered brain, and he can marshal his arguments and assemble his facts and instances in such a way as to lend a certain air of finality to his conclusions. In a word, his display of all the secondary qualities of the good critic is

unsurpassed. But does he show an unerring flair for "the gift"; can he instantly detect quality; has he ever taken a risk, made an original discovery, staked his reputation on a personal judgment? These things are necessary characteristics of the critic as artist; but I confess I can find no trace of them in any of Mr. Gosse's works which I have read. Again and again in his writing we see him examining the judgments of others and basing on them his own "considered estimate." To do this is, perhaps, the rightful privilege of a doyen; it enables him to enjoy his leisure with dignity. The reckless youngsters can always be relied upon to pounce on the new work when it appears and to shout out breathlessly their praise or blame. When the shouts are very loud, Mr. Gosse, like the alligator, opens one eye. Presently, we are made aware that his attention has been called by some young friend to "a slim volume which now lies upon my study table." And after an interval, while Grub Street holds its breath, the fashionable poet of the moment is accorded the measured statement of the pontiff's approval.

The right of succession to the position in the English literary world which Mr. Gosse at present dignifies seems at the moment to be contested by two critics of the younger generation, Mr. J. C. Squire, the editor of *The London Mercury*, and Mr. J. Middleton Murry, the editor of *The Athenæum*. On the whole—unless the fabric of our society during the next twenty years is badly cracked by some revolutionary upheaval which will engulf them both—I personally back the chances of Mr. Murry. He is solemn, learned, earnest and safe. Forty years hence, one can easily imagine him writing the life of some drunken and erotic genius with no word in it more disturbing or more blush-producing than is to be found in all the virginal pages of Mr Gosse's "Life of Swinburne." He has the knack of taking the clumsy utterances of pioneers, cutting out the rubbish, and restating the best of their thoughts with an air of finality. Indeed much of his evolution as an intellectual seems to have consisted in a series of such balanced judgments on the evolutions of more impetuous spirits, and in a tempered acceptance of some of the changes of point of view through which they have passed. He is careful to frequent, in a literary sense, only writers of

assured standing. And yet one feels that *he* feels that whereas to some editors a mere name may be sufficient introduction, *something more* must be required from an aspirant to admission to the *Athenæum* cénâcle. All this has its admirable side, and it would be unjust as well as ungenerous not to recognise the fine qualities which Mr. Murry has displayed both as editor and critic. He has a high conception of his responsibilities, has shown first-rate judgment in his choice of collaborators, and he has certainly kept his paper uncontaminated by the commercial spirit. If the Pontiff system is to continue, the post might well be in worse hands than Mr. Murry's.

Mr. Murry's personal *réclame* is, I gather, not so great as that of Mr. Squire, nor is his influence on critical opinion so widely-diffused or so far reaching. He lacks Mr. Squire's wit and polish. But, in a sporting sense, I back his staying-power.

It cannot be said that the "official" spirit, from which Mr. Murry is happily free, is absent from the literary undertakings with which Mr. Squire is associated. So far the policy of his paper has been largely a policy of "names." Mr. Squire provides a distinguished list, not of contributions, but of contributors. It is instructive to compare the opening numbers of the *London Mercury* with its "throw-outs" by dead writers and its articles of literary gossip adorned with "hitherto unpublished letters" (Dear Sir, please send me ten pounds, P.B. Shelley), with the first issues of the *English Review*. Both periodicals are typical of the age which produced them. In 1909 there were distinct signs of a revival, and Mr. Hueffer—a critic of discernment and courage, possessed by a disinterested passion for good writing—made his choice of all the best work that was available. Quality was the sole criterion ; and among the then "unknown" he discovered almost everyone who was worth discovering. There was something gallant about Mr. Hueffer's editorial adventure. I believe it has rarely had its equal before or since, and that adequate thanks have never been accorded him for it.

Mr. Squire's written criticism is, however, on a higher level than what appears to be his editorial policy. He has wit, his prose style is

forcible and flexible, and his appreciation of the literature of the past is sound and just. Of his contemporaries, however, his judgments are not, perhaps, always impersonal.

Among the few younger critics who show an entirely disinterested love for their art, perhaps the most interesting figures are Mr. T. S. Eliot and Mr. Aldous Huxley. Mr. Eliot has a scientific, analytical brain, and approaches his task with some of the detachment of the great surgeon who, knife in hand, advances towards the exposed flesh of the anæsthetised " case." He rarely makes a cut in the wrong place, he dissects with an unhurried precision, and remorsely reveals the structure and the content of the book on which he " operates." His learning is prodigious, and kept carefully under the counter until it is required. If some of the elusive essences of an author's heart and mind occasionally escape him, we have no right to object. Every critic has his limitations, Mr. Eliot fewer than most. Within these limitations, such as they are, he has undoubtedly one of the most distinguished critical minds of our time. He has a standard of values, and he is honest in applying it.

Mr. Huxley has not, perhaps, Mr. Eliot's science, but he has a nimbler wit, more warmth, and in certain respects a keener intuition. Fancy dwells very often and very agreeably in his writings. Like some large and languid butterfly he will float over a volume of verse and alight gently on *le mot juste* to describe it. One can imagine Mr. Huxley giving as honest and as daring a judgment of a book as Mr. George Moore. Like Mr. Moore, he does not seem to be obsessed by the thought of what he ought to think.

To turn now from the particular to the general, and to discuss papers rather than persons, it seems to me that as reviewing goes now, the highest general level is still maintained by the *Times Literary Supplement*. Its reviews are unsigned (an important point), and the paper maintains an admirable impartiality. It appears to be little influenced by the cliques. It is hard to trace in its columns any signs of personal, or political, or editorial prejudice. It has also another valuable quality. All the books which it receives are carefully examined and classified, and those chosen for review are

the ones which—after due consideration—are held to be most worthy of attention.

In this the *Times Literary Supplement* contrasts favourably with *The Nation*. In this paper the choice of books for notice appears to be absolutely haphazard. In almost any issue you may see some of the best critical writing of the day printed cheek by jowl with some of the worst. The notices of novels frequently give the impression that someone in the office has, on press day, polished off the first half dozen volumes he could find, in order hastily to provide a column of matter to fill up. In one of these slap-dash pronouncements I once came upon a masterpiece of idiocy which has remained in my memory ever since. " How is it " the reviewer asked, " that Mr. George Moore can possibly have the reputation of a man of letters ! "

Of the daily papers, the literary criticism in the *Daily News* is perhaps the most efficient ; though the editorial policy is open to certain objections. The *Daily News* was, for example, one of the first papers to exploit the signed review. Miss Rebecca West's engaging pertness and Mr. Philip Guedalla's wit are, of course, excellent in their way. But the effulgence of these twin stars has had a pernicious effect on their competitors, who have been inspired by their example not to follow the thorny path which leads to success in criticism considered as an art, but to achieve a personal success, and to establish their prestige in their particular clique—in a word, to be " brilliant."

I suppose there never was a time when critical prose, considered purely as prose, displayed a more uniform brilliance than it does to-day. The fireworks get brighter and brighter, and end up, at the foot of the column, in a set piece in which the name or initials of the reviewer are dazzlingly illuminated. The delighted reader finds himself gazing at this name or at these initials with such wonder and admiration that he usually forgets altogether the work which has occasioned the display. The " star " system is responsible for many evils, but perhaps the worst of them is the encouragement which it has lent to the growth of those " rings " and combines which have now established themselves in control of England's

literary output. Those whom the " star " attacks are tempted to form an offensive and defensive alliance against him. Those whom he praises rally at once to his side in order that his encomiums may never lose their potency and their effect. Thus the cliques come into being.

Such is the state of things to which we have come to-day that the literary aspirant to fame—plus an income of say £150 a year—who falls foul of the cliques, or asserts his independence by declining to sue for admission to any of them, had better give up the struggle straight away and sell bacon. If you get into a clique or " ring " you can at least rely on its members praising you, while the members of the other cliques will probably accord you the valuable advertisement of abuse. If you remain outside, and if you are a harmless person, the chances are that your books will never be reviewed at all. And if you are not a harmless person you run the risk of having the whole pack yelping at your heels whenever you succeed in persuading a publisher to print you. It is small wonder that the majority of writers take the line of least resistance and squeeze in somewhere.

It is obvious that the state of things here referred to is vicious in the extreme. It has a deadening effect on literature, because it tends to exalt mere cleverness and to starve out genius. (Genius can never squeeze itself into a " ring.") If we are indeed to see a renaissance of literature and art in this country—such a renaissance as the history of the past would lead us to suppose is overdue —then there must be a revival of the art of criticism to prepare the way for it. The cliques and combines must somehow be dispersed and broken up. Perhaps it would be a step in the right direction if the limelight could once again be switched off the personality of the " literary editor," and the signatures erased from the reviews. But I think the real solution of our troubles lies in the re-discovery of a standard of values.

For the man who really has a standard of values can refer to it almost any kind of artistic expression with some degree of safety. The question he asks himself is not so much whether such and such a thing is or is not " high art," but rather is it good of its kind, and

does it at least express a distinct personality ? The juxtaposition of such names as (for example) those of Miss Gabrielle Ray, Mr. Bernard Shaw, Mr. Jack Norworth, Miss Marie Lloyd, Mr. D. H. Lawrence, Grock, Mr. Thomas Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, Mr. Wyndham Lewis, George Robey, and Mr. Max Beerbohm would cause a born critic like Arthur Symons no uneasiness whatever. But somehow I feel that if one of our Pontiffs were to find himself suddenly confronted by the capacious bosom and rolling eye of Miss Victoria Monks, in the act of singing—as if for him alone—" I wish I had a pal like you," his standard of values would be thrown completely out of gear. The bell would not ring. He would, I fancy, turn a bleak back on the young friend responsible for the misadventure and fade with dignity from the theatre. And yet it is the fine artist which makes the fine art. And it is the fine appreciation, the true flair, which can detect the touch of genius even when it shows itself in the musical comedy belle or the red-nosed comedian.

It is high time a new note was struck in our criticism ; high time it became impatient of shams and pretensions, indifferent to social influences and to the vagaries of fashion. Real criticism is, of course, a difficult job. It is a combination of an exact science and a delicate art, which demands a certain asceticism of the intellect for which the disorderly modern mind is perhaps little fitted. But there seems no reason why our reviewers should not begin once more to take an interest in the arts they write about, and to express opinions, independently arrived at, with frankness and honesty. It is to be hoped that they will once again find courage to utter those " truth-speaking things " which " shame the angel's veiling wings," things which " make the gods shake, they know not why." Our literary heaven is too comfortably asleep, and the return of Uriel is overdue.

Form and the Modern Novel

BY W. L. GEORGE.

IT seems strange that one should have to ask oneself—What is form ? What is a novel ? Such questions should not, I think, inflame debate, except in academies, where forms are cut from the living body of literature, dried, coloured and neatly displayed like the entrails of a frog at the South Kensington Museum. One might expect of literary criticism something like this: "A novel is a narrative of fictitious facts, that strives to interest by the incidents that arise from the relations of fictitious characters. It may reflect the period. It may express the author, consciously or unconsciously. His characters may express certain ideas. The novel's object is to interest." And as for form one might expect merely this : " Form is one of the methods by which the novelist expresses the narrative we have spoken of. If it is ideally suitable, it is good. If it is not ideally suitable, that is if the story is not entirely lucid, the form is not so good, and may be bad."

Which means that to my mind form must be judged by its results. " Vathek " and " Cranford " are both good books, but in form they differ. Indeed, the " Cranford " form, applied to " Vathek," would be absurd. Yet that is not the modern point of view. A blind reaction has formed against the propagandist novel, which seems to have begun with Kingsley, and against the psychological novel, which seems to have begun with Henry James. The modern critics are beginning to measure novels by a foot rule, which I am inclined to call an inch rule, and to lay down that if a novel mentions current events, or embodies a character who has ideas, then it is a pamphlet and not a novel. Which seems to narrow the field to sofas, kisses, catching mackerel, death-beds and tea-caddies. I have nothing against tea-caddies, but when I consider the *London Mercury's* review of fiction in 1919, where no junior to Mr. Bennett is thought worth mentioning, having been swept into the limbo of propaganda and self-exploitation, I conclude that literary plaudits go to tea-caddies. Just as pictorial plaudits go to still life.

It is queer. Perhaps every cheer carries within its echoes the germ of a jeer to come. Perhaps Wagner, Whistler, Verlaine, Wells, had first to be adored so that they might ultimately be burned. This may seem irrelevant, but it is not, because, as much as style, form is the man, and, at the behest of the literary critics of " The Mausoleum," " The Pink Quarterly," and " Last Year's News," I am not going to throw " L'Education Sentimentale " into the dustbin because Flaubert took notice of the political events preceding 1848 instead of confining himself to the emotions of Angeline when presented with new garters.

Above all, I am not going to believe that form is immutable. Take, for instance, " Tom Jones," " Vanity Fair," and " The Old Wives' Tale." The first is discursive, waggish, and excludes the essential author ; the second, though far too long, is diffuse rather than discursive ; it has thrown over the picaresque in favour of the realistic, and its author hums through its pages like a bluebottle ; the third follows a skeleton plan that leaves no room for literary growths, while the author excludes himself so completely that the reader fails to perceive him. If these examples are not pleasing, the reader can compare Jane Austen, Trollope, and George Meredith with more or less analogous results.

Form, therefore, varies with time, and it also varies among the nations. Thus no Englishman could have written " The Idiot " ; no Russian " Pickwick Papers " (Gogol failed). But we do reach a suggestion of finality when we consider that national differences have been abolished by their period. Thus, if we take the three best national novelists of the nineteenth century, Turgenev, Flaubert, and Thomas Hardy, we discover an important fact : there are similarities in their form. Flaubert was born in 1821, Turgenev in 1818, Mr. Thomas Hardy in 1840 ; taking into account that Mr. Hardy has published no novel since 1895, it is roughly possible to call them contemporaries. Therefore form may be a matter of period. For my part, I think it is, *and this because the novel reflects the period, the period and all the period.* (I am sorry for the tea-caddy school, but there you are.)

Of course form grows within form, and influences vary the

current form. Thus, while we remain under the sway of the Flaubert theory that the right way to compose literature is to use words of three letters, we run along the parallel track of the psychological novel, which, starting from Stendhal, passes through Henry James, reaches Miss Ethel Sidgwick, and to-day produces Mrs. Virginia Woolf and Miss Clemence Dane. In spite of the extreme talent of this school, I cannot help thinking that the influence on English literature of Henry James has been futile, greenery-yallery, briefly evil.

The form of the modern novel is a little difficult to state because novelists arrive so early that the evolution of form is hastened ; experiments are made while the old form stands. Thus, when we say " the modern novel " we do not know whether " modern " means, say, the Bennett way, or the Walpole way, or the Wyndham Lewis way. For my part I mean all three. I imagine form in fiction like a strawberry plant which throws out new shoots that develop and proliferate, while the original plant still grows. If we take first the older writers, we find in Mr. Bennett a very strong French influence, which combines with English Victorianism. In Mr. Galsworthy we find the same thing, the desire to tell his story simply, continuously, linking incident nine with incident two, and making, if he can, incident fourteen inevitable. Mr. Wells is also semi-Victorian in form, but he is impatient and escapes into digressions that interest him. Mainly he writes in splendid chaos. As for Mr. Conrad, he most definitely, with his plots, sub-plots, and counter-plots, carries on the tradition, and moves among the difficulties of his form with amazing dexterity. In a way those four exhibit the twentieth century reshaping of the Victorian form, which Mr. Thomas Seccombe defines as follows : " Moral thesis. Plot. Under-plot. Set characters, descriptive machinery, landscape colouring, copious phraseology, Herculean proportions and the rest of the cumbrous and grandiose paraphernalia of Chuzzlewit, Pendennis, and Middlemarch."

That is important, because the difference between the four and their followers defines the evolution of form. Among those whom we still call " the young men," Mr. Walpole, Mr. Mackenzie, Miss

Viola Meynell, Mr. Beresford, etc., we find mainly a desire for self-expression which is rather careless of form. It is difficult to believe that Mr. D. H. Lawrence, or Mr. Mackenzie, or Mr. Waugh, have ever sat down to plan out their novels from paragraph one to paragraph eighty-eight, or to lay down a beginning, a middle, and a fully resolved end. I suspect that they have conceived their story in general, and that it has written itself. Thus we have passed from mechanical form into instinctive form. When, as in the case of Mr. Swinnerton and Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, the novelist has a mind peculiarly well-ordered, the result is admirable. But if the mind is diverse and impulsive, we obtain incoherence. We may even obtain " Sylvia Scarlett."

In other words we reach the cinema. I would almost say that the three most powerful influences on the 1905-1915 novel were the cinema, " Sanin," and Mr. Romain Rolland. Mr. Rolland convinced the young novelists that no plot at all was required, and so form began to follow life, which has no form. The cinema arrived in a form alleging that life is just one damn thing after the other. And " Sanin " to show the young novelist that he was a Sanin. The result has been a search for character, for the expression of emotion (as opposed to the expression of ideas), and a pursuit of beauty for beauty's sake. This amounts to a belief that literature can be life. Which is not true. A novel of three hundred pages can express the incidents of a dozen lives, of several centuries : but no novel of ordinary length can express *all* the incidents that afflict, and *all* the emotions that arise in a single character for a single week. The " young men," realising this, have tried to select, but in a region so vast they naturally tend to select scraps of chaos.

We see the result of this in the latest row of moderns, Mr. James Joyce, Mr. Wyndham Lewis, Miss Dorothy Richardson, and in the second advent of Miss May Sinclair. Here the intellectual idea completely disappears ; only the character survives, his emotions and his sensations. First he gets up and prays, and *feels*. (He does not think.) Then he brushes his teeth and experiences the bristles as they move right and left. Also up and down. This causes the emotions to vary. Time passes. The character experiences marriage.

Or travelling in the Underground. So the plot, which had already, as in Mr. Lawrence, been reduced to the story of a life, becomes still more attenuated. It is reduced to impressions received during a certain time. The incidents of that period take on a minor value ; nothing matters except the sensations these incidents arouse. The book turns into a series of vignettes, and because there is not the slightest reason why the picture of Joan going to the pillar should not replace that of Harry getting drunk at the " Red Lion," I feel entitled to say that the form has disappeared. One obtains perhaps an effect of abstract drawing . . . but there is no abstract literature.

Where are we going to ? Shall we, under the orders of Dr. Freud, persist in tearing at our dreams ? I am not, of course, dismissing as nonsense the works of Mr. Joyce and Miss Richardson, but I do not believe they indicate the future of English novels. This because they have made a leap ; they are entirely unlinked with their forerunners. And no form can survive that does not spring from another form. They are purely pictorial. Into what form the English novel will settle within the next twenty years I do not know, but I believe that it will continue to seek coherence, and I am perfectly sure that the coming novelists will be as clear-minded as were Flaubert and Samuel Butler. They may be called old-fashioned realists, sociologists, progapandists . . . but even so they are not going to pretend that life contains neither politics, nor economics, nor sex problems, nor labour questions. They understand these things. They are affected by them intellectually as well as emotionally. Their characters discuss them in life, and in novels they will discuss them too. They are not going to be content with " writing " a picture of a man who wears a brown coat. They are much too ambitious. And they will leave the emotional delineation of tea-caddies to the better equipped followers of Mr. Cézanne.

Miss Clemence Dane

BY ALEC WAUGH

MISS CLEMENCE DANE'S " Legend " has probably received more serious criticism than any other novel that has been published this year. And yet the majority of critics have concerned themselves mainly with the book's technique, with the skill with which the character of a woman is presented to the reader indirectly through the conversation of a number of people who do not understand her. And it is certainly a triumph. Not one of the men and women who were discussing Madala Grey were able to see in her anything more than their own reflection. Her career and character were to them a legend and a symbol, the unconscious expression of their own ambitions and desires. And yet through their conversation Madala emerges clearly and distinctly. It is a real technical feat, but it is only the obvious part of the book, it is only the medium through which Miss Clemence Dane has chosen to express an intricate emotional relationship. And it is in the study of that relationship that the importance of Miss Dane's work lies.

One of the chief supports of Schopenhauer's misogamy was the fact that no natural woman had ever produced a work of art. And until quite recently the work of women writers certainly threw very little light upon the subtleties of feminine psychology. A woman's life was so entirely dominated by man, her efforts in any direction were so dictated by the desire to please man that when she began to write of herself she wrote of herself not as she actually was, but as she appeared to man ; she decked herself in the clothes that she thought would be most pleasing to him : of herself she revealed very little. This is a rough generalisation to which it would be easy enough to find exceptions, but it is worth noticing that one of the many results of the suffrage movement has been a tendency on the part of the woman novelist to see things from a feminine rather than a masculine standpoint. And the action and interest of both of Miss Dane's important novels are centred solely on the

relations that may exist between woman and woman, the way they react upon one another, their jealousies and obsessions and the inhibited sexuality that finds its outlet either in cruelty or cynicism or sentimentality, according to its particular subject. Her three books only contain five men, one of whom remains a silent figure throughout the entire story, and two of the others are only introduced casually to help out a situation. However interesting and novel the technique of " Legend " may be, it is the soul of the book that matters, and " Legend " is closely linked up with " Regiment of Women " in everything except externals. It is the same problem seen from another side. Anita Serle has much in common with Clare Hartill, they both form violent attachments for younger women, and both of them are robbed of their happiness by marriage. The theme is the same in both. But in " Legend," because of the technical triumph, it is far more dramatically expressed.

" Regiment of Women," even if it is only a half success, is a very splendid triumph. It is a story full of possibilities. Clare Hartill, a masculine, almost homosexual woman, who hates men and is attracted only by her own sex, is one of the senior mistresses at a girl's High School. And her thwarted nature exists through the youth and freshness of others. There is Louise, a schoolgirl of eleven, and Aylwin Durrand, a young and pretty mistress, and for both of them Clare has a violent infatuation. She is madly, wildly jealous. She wants each of them for herself alone. She cannot bear the idea of a friendship between Louise and Aylwin, and her suppressed feelings find their outlet in a fierce intellectual sadism. She tortures Louise, makes her wretched and morbid, till finally the child jumps out of the window and kills herself. And Clare's cruelty turning round onto Aylwin, makes her colleague believe that it is because of her that Louise has killed herself.

Then Alywin falls in love, and Clare is once again mad with jealousy : she tries to prevent the marriage, and very nearly succeeds. It is a theme full of possibilities. But somehow or other Miss Dane has not been able to get on to paper what she has created for herself in her imagination. It seems as though there came a point where the characters took the matter into their own hands, situations

developed in such a way as to demand a different treatment from that which their author had originally intended. And Miss Dane was faced with the dilemma which is a common experience of every novelist, should she change the beginning, bring it down to a lower plane, curb the imagination, or should she let the story tell itself, and work it out on a bigger, a nobler plan? Miss Dane chose the harder alternative, and she did not quite bring it off.

Everything that follows the death of Louise comes as an anti-climax. Aylwin's romance does not raise the ensuing clash of temperaments to the high dramatic level that the course of the story dictated; perhaps this is because Roger is such an unconvincing lover. He is stodgy in the worst sense, and one cannot but feel a sort of horror at the idea of Aylwin's freshness and vitality being wasted in his uninspired embrace. There is too much of him, and, though he is allowed to discuss the prospects of personal immortality at great length, he never makes one feel that he is in love.

But even so, " Regiment of Women " is a big achievement; the tragedy of a woman like Clare Hartill has not before been dealt with, at any rate in English literature. She is a menace, having in her something of the vampire, but she is irresistibly tragic. She could never be happy. However strong her friendships might be, however much of herself she might give out, she would never get anything satisfying in return. Sooner or later the man must come to take her friend from her, leaving her lonely. And each disappointment makes her the more jealous and exacting, the more ready to demand sacrifice from others, and the more cruel in her revenge on those that interfere with her.

Anita Serle is like her in many ways. But in her case the friendship is complicated by her literary ambitions. Anita is not only emotionally but artistically unsatisfied. She realises she has not a creative genius. She can only react. And as a result she is as much absorbed in Madala's career as in Madala herself. So that when the husband takes Madala from her, Anita sees not only the loss of a friend, she also sees the genius of an artist being dissipated in marriage and maternity. Madala will express herself in her life rather than in her books. And the tragedy of Anita is perhaps

increased by the conscious witholding of the husband. He is regarded as a malignant force, and is not allowed to materialise. It is just as well, for one cannot but fear lest the stolid doctor who does not take the trouble to read his wife's novels is only Justin Cloud seen from another side.

And yet " Legend " does not finish satisfactorily. Anita is the central figure, and the book should end with her. Instead of that it closes on an unconvincing discovery of mutual love between the young girl who tells the story and an artist, one of Madala's admirers, who alone has held back from the conversation. It is the one thing in the book that does not quite come off.

To her other novel, " " First the Blade," it is perhaps kinder not to refer. It is little more than an interlude. " Legend " and " Regiment of Women " show clearly what is the scope, the strength, and the weakness of Miss Dane's writing. She is working on an untilled field. It is pioneer work, and therefore more interesting than that of other and perhaps better novelists who are dealing with the universal themes of literature. Miss Dane has interpreted much in human nature that has been overlooked.

To the Victorians the spinster of thirty-seven was a ridiculous creature with her whims and fancies, and sudden outbursts of petulant temper. She was regarded as a nuisance, a thing to be laughed at. She was seen from the outside, and no one took the trouble to understand her. But Miss Dane has revealed the same woman as a tragic creature, unsatisfied, tormented with suppressed emotion, rankling with jealousy.

But in contrast to this, in contrast even to the masculinity of her women, one has to place the complete ineffectuality of Miss Dane's heroes. At present there are only two of them, and they are both of the same type. The large, stupid, kindly sort of person that one associates with an alehouse and a farm. But they lack the vitality of the Western yokel. Justin Cloud, for instance, in " First the Blade," is engaged for over a year without kissing his fiancée, a perfectly natural girl, and without apparently showing the least wish to do so. He is quite uninspired, and though no doubt such a man might exist, it would need the most careful work before the

novelist could make his character convincing. Miss Dane, however, seems to accept him as quite a normal person who needs no especial explanation.

And this inability to create a convincing man is a very serious drawback. It is responsible for the only weak spot in " Legend," for the eventual failure of " Regiment of Women," and for " First the Blade." Her books will always be in the main, one would imagine, studies of the relations between woman and woman, but unless she can introduce a real man at the right moment the full value of these relations is going to be wasted. In both her important books the friendship of two women is only the prelude to the intense dramatic struggle caused by the intrusion of normal love. And one cannot but feel that before she can write a really big book Miss Dane will have to create a genuine masculine character. The ideas and situations at which she is working are extraordinarily interesting, but they are as yet incomplete, because they are not carried to their logical conclusion. It would be possible, no doubt, to write a book in which no man appeared at all, but it could not have the same emotional value, as one in which both sexes were included in the action, and at present it would seem that one can go no further than this in the appreciation and criticism of Miss Dane's novels.

The Short Story

" There are no dead "

By GERARD HOPKINS.

WE are to be encouraged, it seems, to write short stories. At least one English periodical has advertised its intention of " reviving the lost art," the exercise of which promises to become as lucrative as the power of prophesying the results of football matches and boxing contests. The Editor of the " Strand " magazine has given public expression, lately, to his views on Tchekov. This is all, of course, very helpful, and those who watch with tireless eyes for the new renaissance should display appropriate enthusiasm. What more imposing than to see the armies of Fleet Street with their Promoters, their Printers, and their cinematograph operators, moving in procession to the tomb of genius there to invoke, raise, and revivify the corpses of past story-tellers ; but what an anti-climax if they find, upon arrival, the stone rolled away and no dead to welcome them.

In England there is no art of the short story, but everybody writes short stories. It is unfortunate that this particular department of literature should be regarded as the easiest because often the most remunerative. Men and women who shrink from the labours of the novelist turn to it without misgiving. " Anybody," they argue, " can write short stories," and they are encouraged in their conclusions by editors and agents who implore them to exercise in odd moments of leisure " their undoubted gifts." The English-speaking world is suffering from the fact that anybody *can*, in a sense, write short stories, but the writing of them is the least of all the necessities. The only question worth considering is whether we have a short story tradition, or failing that, whether there are at the present moment in this country men and women who have given evidence that they can feel life and interpret truth in this particularly highly specialised, and extremely difficult form of imaginative fiction. For twenty novels of ability produced by

English writers we look in vain for one short story of equal promise. The art, it would seem, is none of ours. In the last hundred years it has claimed in Europe but three supreme masters, Turgénev, Tchekov, and Maupassant, and the greatest of these—it is dull to say badly what Mr. Moore has said so well—is Turgénev. These men alone had to the full the power of painting life on the small canvas, of finding therein a natural, true medium of expression. The story for them was never merely a recreation from bigger work. They sought and found in it the natural outlet for their genius. It is noticeable that Tchekov lives for us in his tales and his plays, that Maupassant was never so happy in his novels as in the rest of his work, that Turgénev, even in his longest books, keeps always about him the atmosphere of the short story. I never doubted the justice of reckoning in this category his masterpiece—" Torrents of Spring "—until counting its words I found they totalled over sixty thousand. Many contemporary English novels contain less without impressing the reader as unduly curtailed.

The short story at its best has about it something severe, formal, clear-cut. It is influenced by the classical tradition, and in England that has, despite the eighteenth century, influenced us but superficially. The flood of our literature has found, in the main, another channel. The characteristic of our imagination has always been exuberance rather than logic, leading us away from the classic to romance, to naturalism, and finally to psychology. Fiction with us has been, to its glory no doubt, the prey of our great men : it has founded few schools and left but a handful of " rules." Our one great story-teller came just too early in our history to give abiding form to the national literature. Chaucer foreshadowed the Renaissance, he was not, strictly, of it. When its full dawning came other influences had, with us, grown to maturity, and dappled the daylight with shadow. In Europe it produced that prince of story-tellers, Boccaccio, in England it created the drama. With the death of Marlowe English literature turned definitely away from the " tale," and only now is it making an effort, as yet unsuccessful, to return to it. " Faustus " is our last supreme example of short story, the last effort of an English writer to unroll calmly, incisively,

and without undue emphasis, a theme the conclusion of which is inherent in its beginning and visible throughout its development. The end comes without surprise, logically, unmercifully. In " A King and no King " Beaumont and Fletcher attempted to achieve the same severity, the same inevitability, but at the last their courage failed and the play limps wooden-legged to an unconvincing end.

The drama of the Elizabethans owes its amazing beauty to the genius of a few men and the vitality of a period. Its conventions were not of its choice, they accumulated from various sources. Those who made of it their medium had to build upon a curious patched framework, a legacy of church and fair. There was little usage to which they could conform, no accepted body of rules comparable to those of the Greek stage, in obedience to which they could shape their work. They were at once pioneers and experts, and in this precocity of the period lay both its strength and its weakness. An intractable material was shaped by great men to their own ends. Shakespeare, Webster, Massinger, Ben Jonson, by the fire of their inspiration, could sweep away the obstacles that beset them. Their lesser contemporaries and followers could, by an amazing exuberance of language and imagination which those golden years gave even to pygmies, fashion for us a legacy that still has value in our eyes, but they felt the deadweight of a cumbersome convention, and too often they fell beneath it. Our great age left us no " Poetics," no manual of observances for future generations. The Puritan revolution killed the vigour of romantic imagination, and though exuberance returned it had not power enough to overcome entirely the weakness of the inherited technique with which it worked. With the restoration of the King and the playhouse, the absence of a definite tradition of construction made itself felt at once. The faults of the Elizabethan stage became prominent. Complexity of plot already noticeable in Ben Jonson degenerated still further into the tangle of intrigue which formed the framework of the new Comedy, and great though the achievements were of Congreve, Wycherly, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar, they removed from English letters still further the probability of the short story becoming a form of national art.

The novel, which during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries absorbed more and more all that was most vigorous in imaginative fiction, tended to build the barrier still higher. Prose narrative drifted into anecdote, parenthesis, digression. Its length, a necessity for entertainment at a time when production was slow and editions limited, militated against severity of form, and though a high level of constructive ingenuity was reached it was not the kind most suitable to the short story. The great novelists tended to rely for their effects upon complexity of plot, multiplicity of characters, indefiniteness of treatment. It is impossible to maintain that Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, or Meredith, succeeded in discarding successfully, even on the rare occasions when they made the attempt, the cumbrous machinery of their art. Even Mr. Hardy in his tales is never so completely at home as when he works at full length. Jane Austen alone possessed the natural directness, limpidity, and sense of shape in fiction which is the foundation upon which the great short stories of the world have been built.

We have then, in this art, no dead, and our new patrons will, of necessity, return sadly from the empty tombs. It remains for them to create what they cannot revive, to lure from obscurity, by high-sounding promises, the future tale-tellers of the race. It is then worth while to enquire what is the peculiar quality that is, and must be, found in the supreme short story. Actual length, it will be agreed, is of but minor importance. There are, of course, limits beyond which, in this sense, the story cannot go, but the limits are elastic. In general we may perhaps lay down that twenty thousand words is the extreme allowance for the normal story. Even to this, however, we must admit exceptions. I am loth to relinquish " Torrents of Spring " as a " short " story, yet to suggest seventy thousand words as commonly admissable seems to stretch the term beyond the meaning it is strictly capable of bearing. What really distinguishes the short story from the novel is not length but treatment. Its essence seems to me to lie in simplicity of texture combined with concentration of emotion and absence of violent surprise. To confine the duration of its action is impossible. Many of the finest short stories are doubtless marked by a certain unity of space and time, but there

are just as many that ignore both while remaining essentially true to type. Maupassant's " Les Soeurs Rondoli " drifts through at least two winters, Tchekov's " The Darling " tells of the major part of a lifetime. What, however, all share in common is the relation of an incident (in " The Darling " it is the same incident repeated with variations) that has taken on the significance of a theme. In the novel incidents are used, as a rule, to build up the theme. Through their multiplicity is developed the underlying scheme of the whole. Through their interplay atmosphere is created, character unfolds, plan evolves. In the short story, on the other hand, the incident itself becomes the theme, it is the musical motif that by analysis and modulation fills, gradually, the whole composition. When atmosphere has to be suggested it must be done at once, incisively, there is little time for an elaborate setting of the stage.

Nothing is more objectionable or more futile than to lay down rules for future art, and from that point of view it is a fine thing to have no " dead," but it is as well to note that all the great short stories have been developed with a strict, visible logic, they have been conceived, in varying degrees, from a detached point of view, carefully staged and composed, their parts duly balanced. Turgénev, Tchekov, Maupassant, all possessed the power of objectifying their themes and of building with them clearly shaped designs. What they had in common was not a view of life but a method of presenting whatever view they had. All three had, to an amazing degree, the power of observing, assimilating, and universalizing the significance of character, but when they came to state their results they all insisted upon the simplicity of the design and the balance of the composition. In " Torrents of Spring " the " spacing "—if one may borrow a phrase from the graphic arts—is only less amazing than the understanding and sympathy that goes to the making of the story. At first sight this seems to be merely a question of technique, but it is, in reality, far more ; it is technique that comes naturally from a definite way of observing and feeling the material of the story, an attitude to life which involves its own technique.

This peculiar angle of vision we, in England, lack at the present

time. Minor forms of the short story we have to perfection. At their best they are grotesque and humorous. Of ghosts we tell excellently, of mystery and of farce. Between fun and grimness there seems to be a curious connexion in our national imagination, witnessed by the fact that Mr. Jacobs, a humorist by profession, has never written anything to compare for excellence with his "Monkey's Paw." And yet the supreme English achievements of this kind are essentially episodic, their authors cannot, it seems, use the form of the short story as anything but a minor weapon, they rarely find in it a medium for great expression or profound feeling. Even our cleverest tales of mystery lack the "universal" character that Poe gave to similar material, but then he called his stories tales of "mystery and imagination," and it is just the imagination that so many contemporary stories seem to lack. Perhaps alone of modern authors Mr. Kipling has succeeded in finding his true medium in the short story. It is unpopular, I know, to praise him, but the fact remains that he alone can claim success in this form. From the highest peaks of all he is indeed cut off by a certain limitation of vision. What he can see clearly, what he knows intimately, he can treat with supreme deftness. His mastery over the material of his art is superb, but he lacks, unfortunately, the wide sympathies without which the greatest literature is unattainable. Of the commonplace touched with inspiration he is the most wonderful exponent that this country has known, but he has given us no interpretation of life that by its individuality and truth can touch us to thankfulness or wonder. When all his characters are forgotten we still see in thought the figures of Dmitri Sanin and Andrei Yefemitch. Others we have had, besides Mr. Kipling, who might in time have given us great stories, but most of them abandoned too soon the attempt. Gissing has left a few admirable examples but the circumstances of his life compelled him to turn too soon and too completely to the novel. Henry James long ago wrote "Daisy Miller" and "Four Meetings," but that was before he wove for himself a garment of words. A few contemporaries there are who give the lie to pessimism, but they appear too seldom in answer to our prayers. Mr. Max Beerbohm we have indeed, but he is elusive,

migratory, and Italy has too long bewitched him: Mr. Frank Harris is still living, but despite the warnings of "John Bull," America yet holds him.

Among the younger generation our novelists have either "arrived" too completely to experiment with new forms, or they are under the influence of a movement the very nature of which prevents them at present from finding in the short story a natural medium. The "objective" method is not just now in favour, and fiction tends to length, complexity or self-communing. Miss Ethel Colburn Mayne has been hailed and rewarded as a "distinguished writer of short stories," but she lacks the true touch of the masters. She is too clever, and so terrified of telling the obvious that we lose all interest before her tale is out in what she really has to tell. The glamour of Miss Richardson is about her, and she has attempted to adapt to a few pages a method, the only justification for which has to be sought, apparently, in an endless series of full length novels. So long as she remains loyal to her model she may produce brilliant "sketches," and "impressions," but it is doubtful whether she will ever compass a perfect story. To a mind that finds an equal aesthetic value in every reaction, physical, emotional, and intellectual, nothing less than a hundred thousand words can possibly suffice wherewith to produce its effects and paint its pattern, and even then the result is not always convincing. To achieve anything in a shorter space there must be some sort of a compromise, and Miss Mayne quite frankly confesses this by relying for her effects upon ultimate surprise and shock by means of which she attempts to force definite shape into a material which does not naturally admit any sharpness of outline at all. The point or "punch" of her stories she places almost without exception in the last paragraph, sometimes in the last line, a trick which she seems to have learned from O. Henry and tacked on to a totally different technique.

It is a thankless task to prophesy, but it may be said without risking too much, that if the short story is to become a worthy medium and a potent force in English literature we must turn back and learn once again the value of detachment. A short time ago I read a story by Miss Katharine Mansfield called "The Pictures,"

and I am rather inclined to pin my faith on her. It was in its way a masterpiece, and what is more important in the present connexion, a perfect example of the art of tale-telling. From it one gathered the impression that Miss Mansfield had really found her medium. I am told that the " New Decameron " has opened a new era, and this, having read none of it, I am quite willing to believe.

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